



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Fire Island
National Seashore

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Fire Island National Seashore News Release

Release date: Immediate

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Date: March 13, 2006

Release code: 06-03

Piping Plovers Return to Fire Island; National Park Service Implements Annual Protection Procedures

Patchogue, NY—The first piping plover observed on Fire Island was spotted by the park's Student Conservation Association volunteer monitors on March 13, 2006. Nesting and mating begins soon after the birds arrive, and the first egg of the 2006 season can be expected by late April. In hopes of continuing last year's success rate with its threatened and endangered species, Fire Island National Seashore will install symbolic fencing to protect suitable plover habitat. As nests are established, exclosures will be constructed to protect both the nests and the eggs. During the plover nesting season, the National Park Service closes portions of its beaches to pets and kites, and further restricts vehicle access to the beach. From March 15 through Labor Day, pets and kites are not permitted at the following Fire Island National Seashore locations:

- On the ocean beach from the east boundary of Robert Moses State Park to the Village of Kismet.
- On the ocean beach between Oakleyville and Cherry Grove in the Sailors Haven area (which is part of the Sunken Forest Preserve).
- From the western boundary of Smith Point County Park west to Old Long Cove, east of Watch Hill.

Pets and are not permitted at any time on lifeguarded beaches at Watch Hill and Sailors Haven.

(more)

The park begins preparing for the return of the piping plover in late March. Some restrictions on beach driving are implemented by March 15. By April 1, symbolic fencing has been installed on portions of the beach that produced successful nests last year or that met the criteria for desirable plover breeding habitat. As nests are established, park staff and volunteers construct protective exclosures to keep predators away from the eggs. Once nest-building and egg-laying begins, the National Park Service may restrict pets, except seeing eye dogs, and kite-flying at other beach locations.

Piping plover mating usually occurs from late March through early June. Plovers generally lay one egg every other day until they reach a complete clutch of four eggs. The eggs are incubated for about 27 days. Once hatched, chicks fledge, or fly from the nest, usually within 35 days. Most nesting activity has ceased by mid-August and the birds fly south for the winter.

Until the chicks are able to fly, residents and visitors to Fire Island National Seashore are asked to respect the closed areas set up to protect these birds. Dogs and people running through enclosed areas may crush eggs and chicks. Flying kites and flags may resemble a hovering hawk and frighten chicks and adults, forcing them to abandon their nests. By leaving your dogs and kites at home when you make your trek to the beach, you help enhance the protection of rare, threatened, or endangered bird species. Beach closures also protect endangered plants within the symbolic fencing.

Fire Island National Seashore has been monitoring and protecting its five federally listed threatened and endangered species since 1986. Last year—2005—was one of the most productive seasons recorded since monitoring began. Park biologists recorded 17 breeding pairs of piping plovers (the same number as the year before), but they fledged 40 plover chicks (3 more chicks than were fledged in 2004).

Three portions of the Fire Island shoreline were renourished in the winter of 2003-04, adding more than a million cubic yards of sand to beaches in front of some communities and Smith Point County Park. The Fire Island communities that paid for the dredging were required to protect a percentage of the reclaimed beach for endangered species habitat. Symbolic fencing and exclosures will be encountered on those beaches.

A significant overwash between the Wilderness Visitor Center and Old Inlet is expected to provide approximately 4 acres of prime plover habitat in the Otis Pike Fire Island High Dune Wilderness this year. Fire Island National Seashore's Superintendent Mike Reynolds stated, "We are celebrating twenty years of endangered species protection measures here on Long Island. The past five years have shown progressive improvements. We are hopeful that this will be another successful year. Everyone's cooperation is truly appreciated."



Periodic overwashes—a natural barrier island process—provide ideal nesting habitat for plovers and terns. Symbolic fencing (string between poles, marked with orange flagging) is installed as plovers begin to return to suitable nesting areas. After eggs are laid, staff and volunteers construct a protective exclosure around each nest. Hat covers nest, above, to protect eggs while work is quickly completed.

NPS Photo

For further information about this project or about Fire Island National Seashore, call 631-289-4810, or visit the park web site at www.nps.gov/fiis.

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